



Highlights of [GAO-08-116](#), a report to congressional committees

Why GAO Did This Study

To enhance public safety, all states have laws requiring convicted sex offenders to register with law enforcement authorities. Because ensuring compliance is a challenge, in part because offenders may move frequently, policy makers are considering a role for motor vehicle agencies. In response to section 636 of the Adam Walsh Child Protection and Safety Act of 2006 (the Walsh Act) and as discussed with congressional committees, this report identifies (1) the various driver's license-related processes that states are using to encourage registration or provide additional monitoring of convicted sex offenders; (2) the level of modifications to states' information technology (IT) capabilities that would be needed, and the key cost factors involved, if a federal law were to require the screening of individuals against the respective state's sex offender registry and the Federal Bureau of Investigation's (FBI) National Sex Offender Registry before issuing a driver's license; and (3) other factors that could affect successful implementation of this type of screening program.

To accomplish these objectives, GAO reviewed state statutes and surveyed motor vehicle and public safety agencies in 26 states. The 26 states reflect regional representation, among other factors. GAO also interviewed officials from various components in the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the American Association of Motor Vehicle Administrators (AAMVA). GAO is not making any recommendations in this report.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-116](#). For more information, contact Robert Goldenkoff at (202) 512-8777 or goldenkoffr@gao.gov.

CONVICTED SEX OFFENDERS

Factors That Could Affect the Successful Implementation of Driver's License-Related Processes to Encourage Registration and Enhance Monitoring

What GAO Found

As of July 2007, 22 of the nation's 50 states were using some form of driver's license-related process to encourage registration or provide additional monitoring of convicted sex offenders. For example, nine states specifically require convicted sex offenders to obtain a driver's license, an identification card, or a sex offender registration card issued through driver's license-related processes, and five of these nine states also label the respective document with an annotation that identifies the person as a sex offender. One of the 22 states—Nevada—has a process for screening every driver's license applicant against the state's sex offender registry before issuing a license. However, no state has a screening process whereby all applicants are screened against both the respective state's sex offender registry and the FBI's national registry before being issued a driver's license.

To establish this type of screening process, most of the motor vehicle agencies and sex offender registries in the 26 states surveyed by GAO said that moderate to major modifications to their current IT systems would be needed, with software modifications being a key cost factor. Many of the responding state agencies indicated that before reliable cost estimates for this type of screening process could be developed, operational or functional requirements must be clearly defined. Moreover, a recurring observation by motor vehicle agency officials was that given competing demands for programming resources, the agencies were not positioned to handle additional projects during the next several years.

In addition to addressing IT and cost issues, successful implementation of a driver's license screening program for sex offenders will also hinge on how well the program incorporates key design considerations. Developing an effective "one-size-fits-all" screening program could be a daunting challenge given the different processes, procedures, databases, and operational environments among the motor vehicle and law enforcement agencies across the nation. If the federal government were to require this type of screening process, several key design factors could affect the outcomes of the process. Among other considerations cited by federal, state, and AAMVA officials, particularly important are design factors aimed at minimizing the burden on states, maintaining customer service at motor vehicle agencies, and mitigating unintended consequences. Although not an exhaustive list, these design considerations could affect the results from and the costs of a nationwide screening program. Decisions on the most optimal approach to pursue—and, if applicable, how best to integrate the design considerations discussed in GAO's report—likely would necessitate collaboration among various stakeholders, including interested states, AAMVA, and the FBI, which manages the national sex offender registry.

In commenting on a draft copy of this report, DOJ and AAMVA provided technical clarifications, which GAO incorporated where appropriate.